

Pop Singers and Song Writers Racing Down Bob Dylan's Road

**Musicians' 'Sound' Inspires
a Variety of Entertainers
in 'Folk Rock' Idiom**

By ROBERT SHELTON

If imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, then Bob Dylan must be one of the most flattered performers in American popular music today.

The singer and song-writer, who will appear tomorrow night at the Forest Hills Music Festival in Queens, has fostered a trend that music circles call "the Dylan sound."

At least three groups and one individual who consciously style their singing after Mr. Dylan are listed high on popularity charts of recordings. Sonny and Cher, the Byrds, the Turtles and Donovan all have a strong Dylanesque quality in their recordings.

Many others, from the Beatles to Johnny Cash to the song-writing team of Barry Mann and Cynthia Weil, have publicly acknowledged their debt to Mr. Dylan. And John Lennon has even recorded a song in the Dylan mode.

In a telephone interview, Mr. Dylan, the often enigmatic folk performer, parried questions about his new imitators and the controversy over his fusion of folk music with rock 'n' roll, called "folk rock."

'Missing Something'

"It's all music; no more, no less," the 24-year-old musician from Hibbing, Minn., said. "I know in my own mind what I'm doing. If anyone has imagination, he'll know what I'm doing. If they can't understand my songs they're missing something. If they can't understand green clocks, wet chairs, purple lamps or hostile statues, they're missings something, too."

Many pop-music insiders regard Mr. Dylan as the most influential American performer to emerge since the rise of Elvis Presley 10 years ago. Some think he is on the brink of superstardom.

Mr. Dylan is a wiry, sharp-featured, sunken-eyed youth who affects a somewhat bizarre image. His hair has grown so long since he became interested in "folk rock" that the Beatles look clean-cut by comparison. After leaving Hibbing, he studied briefly at the University of Minnesota but flunked out of the science class, he says, "for refusing to watch a rabbit die."

He went on the road, playing at a carnival and elsewhere, until he got off the subway in Greenwich Village in the spring of 1961.

Since Mr. Dylan was discovered at Gerde's Folk City in September of that year, he has evolved through several composing and performing approaches. Each time he has changed he has brought an increasingly larger segment of



Bob Dylan

the pop and folk music world with him.

The tousle-haired musician, who has written more than 100 songs, expressed a driving need to create and perform new material. "I get very bored with my old songs," he said. "I can't sing 'With God on My Side' for 15 years. What I write is much more concise now than before. It's not deceiving."

When Mr. Dylan first appeared in New York he was strongly under the influence of Woody Guthrie, the Oklahoma ballad-maker. By the spring of 1963, with the popularity of his antidiscrimination protest, "Blowin' in the Wind," he became nationally known. His "Times They Are a' Changin'" was considered a credo for the discontented protesting collegians, for whom he became a spokesman.

Personal Expression

About a year ago he veered toward more personal expression with "Mr. Tambourine Man," a current hit. Last spring he introduced "folk rock" with "Subterranean Homesick Blues" and the currently popular "Like a Rolling Stone."

Some of Mr. Dylan's lyrics are obviously "camp" fantasies, while others are poetically profound. Many are sufficiently elliptical to spur squadrons of interpreters.

Mr. Dylan refused to explain this avant-garde direction. "I have no idea what I'll be doing at Forest Hills Saturday," he said. "I'll have some electricity [electrically amplified instruments] and a new song or a couple of three or four new songs. Time goes by very fast up there onstage. I think of what not to do rather than what to do."